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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BASHIR'S NICER BROTHER: RUFAIDA MEDICAL
FOUNDATION ASSISTS VICTIMS OF THE REGIME'S OWN BRUTAL
POLICIES

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Led by President Omar Al-Bashir,s brother and sister-in-law, the Rufaida Health Foundation (RHF) promotes health services and disaster relief throughout Sudan, notably to populations marginalized or victimized by the policies of the Khartoum government. The Foundation also works to promote HIV/AIDS and drug abuse awareness and treatment. RHF's efforts highlight the contradictions of Sudan,s political elite. End summary.

¶2. (U) On February 6, CDA Fernandez visited the small but active Rufaida Health Foundation and met with RHF Secretary General Dr. Abdullah Al-Bashir and his wife Dr. Nur El Huda Shafie, RHF,s Executive Manager. Dr. Al-Bashir, who is an Irish-trained surgeon in the Sudan Armed Forces Medical Corps, is the younger brother of Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir. Dr. Al-Bashir noted that he must balance his work load at the Foundation with his military duties. The Al-Bashirs described the twin objectives of their Foundation as medical disaster relief and promoting health services throughout Sudan, including in Darfur and other marginalized areas.

Disaster Relief) Darfur and Beyond

¶3. (U) The Al-Bashir,s outlined the RHF,s activities in Darfur. Partnered with the European Union, the Foundation provides both physical and psychological-health services to the local population, including IDPs. The Foundation's services include psychological counseling and treatment to victims of violence, notably traumatized women and children. Education and therapy seek to promote a &culture of peace8 among the population by encouraging recipients to think about ways they can work together to resolve problems. The NGO was previously active in Nyala's teeming Kalma IDP camp and now has an operation in neighboring Otash IDP camp. Dr. Nur described working in Kalma "sitting with weeping women telling you their stories, and you cry too."

¶4. (U) In addition to its Darfur activities, RHF provides emergency medical assistance in natural and man-made disaster areas elsewhere in Sudan, and in areas lacking basic medical care via mobile clinics in partnership with UNICEF. The Foundation has worked in South Sudan, for example, providing post-conflict services in Bentiu, similar to what is providing now in Darfur. CDA commented that, from his experience, this type of mental health outreach is unusual in the Arab world. Dr. Nur agreed that mental health services currently are largely limited to hospitals and need to be more broadly available.

¶5. (U) The Al-Bashirs also described the Foundation's efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and drug abuse. With the support of UNAIDS, RHF works to encourage safe behavior among the population (focusing on high-risk groups, including the prison population and truck drivers) and to make HIV/AIDS services available. RHF also provides drug education and prevention services. Dr. Shafie noted that narcotics are a growing problem in Sudan, due to its location on a transit route for drug smuggling, which contributes to the spread of HIV. The Foundation provides drug-education in the schools, training students who provide the instruction, believing that such peer-to-peer programs will have more credibility.

Opportunities for Partnership

¶6. (U) The CDA expressed his admiration for the work that RHF is doing and said he would encourage American NGO and government institutions to get in contact to explore possible opportunities for cooperation. He noted that USAID already has a large health program in Sudan, mostly in the South but it is consulting internally on how best to restructure its programs in the rest of the country, especially in Darfur. There is a need, of course, for improved physical and mental health services throughout Sudan. He added that the United States has been providing extensive emergency humanitarian aid in Darfur, but wants to begin to transition to development assistance, as it has done in the South. Health programs will be a key part of development in Darfur but only a real improvement in the security situation will enable the international community to shift to early recovery programs.

KHARTOUM 00000195 002 OF 002

Comment

¶7. (SBU) The work of the Rufaida Health Foundation reflects some of the complexity and irony of Sudan's internal turmoil. While the GoS has marginalized wide swaths of the country and its population - and has unleashed terrible suffering in Darfur and earlier in the South - President Al Bashir, his own brother heads an NGO that is performing relief work in these same geographic areas, notably to victims of government-inspired violence. The Foundation also is reaching out to areas that are neglected by Khartoum. We resisted the temptation to ask this busy, well-intentioned couple an obvious question: wouldn't their labors be lightened if the Government headed by their brother wasn't so bent on traumatizing so many of its own citizens?
FERNANDEZ